

padhai | Class X

# English

# Notes



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Explanations**



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Sketch**



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Meanings**



**Tone, Central  
idea, devices....**

**First Flight**

## Madam Rides the Bus

-VALLIKKANNAN

### Detailed Explanation:

The story Madam Rides the Bus narrates the first bus journey of an eight-year-old village girl, Valliammai, popularly known as Valli, whose curiosity and quiet resolve drive the entire narrative. As she has no companions of her own age to play with, she spends most of her time **standing at the doorway** of her house, watching the activities on the street. Among all the sights, the most captivating for her is the **bus** that passes every hour between her village and the nearby town. The narrator remarks that a “tiny wish crept into her head and grew there,” which is an example of personification. Observing the bus becomes a source of “unending joy” for Valli, and her longing to travel in it soon develops into an “**overwhelming desire**,” reflecting both her innocent fascination and her strong determination.

Over a long period, Valli carefully collects detailed information about the journey by **listening attentively** to conversations and **asking** subtle questions. She comes to know that the town is six miles away, the fare for one side is thirty paise, and the journey takes forty-five minutes. Although this amount may seem insignificant to adults, it is quite large for her, which emphasizes her personality/age and her understanding of the value of money. She thoughtfully plans that if she boards the one o'clock bus and does not get down at the town, she can return by about two forty-five without anyone becoming aware of her absence. This careful planning highlights her **intelligence, independence**, and ability to **silently observe** and learn from the adult world.

Finally, on a pleasant spring day, Valli gathers the courage to stop the bus and board it confidently. Her small hand is raised “commandingly,” a word that contrasts sharply with her young age. The conductor, who is cheerful and fond of joking, addresses her playfully as “**madam**,” treating her like an important adult. This serves as an example of irony, as Valli is only a child, yet she strongly desires to be regarded as grown-up. Although she initially feels embarrassed when the passengers laugh, she quickly regains her composure and insists on paying her fare like any other passenger. Her repeated statement, “**There's nobody here who's a child**,” reflects her pride and her desire for independence.

As the bus proceeds, Valli is filled with excitement and wonder. The description of the bus is **vivid**: it is new, shining white with green stripes, and the overhead bars gleam “like silver,” a simile that enhances its attractiveness and gives it an almost magical quality from a child's perspective. The scenery outside is depicted through rich visual imagery—canals, palm trees, grasslands, distant mountains, the blue sky, and endless green fields.

The repetition in expressions such as “blue, blue sky” and “green, green, green” intensifies the visual appeal and conveys the **freshness and mood** of her experience.

The personification in the description of trees appearing to run towards the bus reflects a child’s imaginative perception of motion, making the scene lively and engaging.

Valli’s joy reaches its height when she notices a **young cow** running ahead of the bus with its tail raised. As the bus slows down and the driver honks repeatedly, the cow continues to run faster, creating a humorous situation. Valli laughs uncontrollably, with tears of joy in her eyes. This episode adds a light-hearted element to the story and shows how children can find immense happiness in simple, everyday incidents. However, when the bus reaches the town, she chooses not to get down. She refuses the conductor’s polite offer of a cold drink because she does not have extra money and does not wish to accept anything without paying. This decision reflects her **self-respect, discipline, and clarity of purpose**. Her goal was only to experience the bus ride, not to explore the town.

During the return journey, the tone of the story changes significantly. Valli once again observes the same scenes along the roadside, but this time she notices the young cow lying dead by the roadside, having been hit by a fast-moving vehicle. The earlier cheerful image of the cow is replaced by a **disturbing sight**: it lies with its legs stretched out, its eyes lifeless, and blood around it. This powerful imagery brings Valli face to face with the **harsh reality of death**. The contrast between the lively running cow and its lifeless body creates a strong emotional impact. The memory of this sight disturbs her and reduces her earlier excitement. Through this sudden shift, the story moves from a simple adventure to a deeper understanding, showing that Valli’s first bus journey also becomes her first serious experience of life’s sorrow and mystery.

When Valli returns home, she sees her mother engaged in a casual conversation with an aunt. Neither of them has any idea about where she has been. Her mother comments that there are many things in the world that people cannot fully know or understand. Valli quietly agrees, as she has just undergone an experience that they are unaware of. Her gentle smile at the end carries irony and deeper meaning: while the adults still consider her merely “**a chit of a girl,**” she has silently gained a new level of understanding. Thus, the story skillfully blends childhood curiosity, **humour, independence, and the beginning of emotional maturity**.

## Reference Information:

1. **Valli’s full name:** Her complete name is Valliammai, though she is commonly called Valli, which contributes to the realistic rural setting of the story.

2. **Age of Valli:** Valli is eight years old, and her young age makes her independence and confidence more remarkable.

3. **Reason for her doorway habit:** Since she has no playmates of her own age, she spends her time observing the street from her doorway.
4. **Bus timing:** The bus passes her street every hour, travelling to the town and returning, which helps her plan her journey.
5. **Distance to town:** The town is located six miles away from her village.
6. **Fare details:** The one-way fare is thirty paise, so she needs a total of sixty paise for the complete journey.
7. **Duration of the journey:** The journey to the town takes forty-five minutes.
8. **How Valli gathered information:** She collected details by listening carefully to neighbours and regular passengers and by asking questions in a cautious manner.
9. **How she saved money:** She saved money carefully by avoiding unnecessary expenses such as buying peppermints, balloons, toys, and even a ride at the village fair.
10. **How she left home unnoticed:** She planned her trip during her mother's afternoon nap, usually between one and four o'clock.
11. **Description of the bus:** The bus is described as new, white with green stripes, with shining overhead bars, a beautiful clock, and comfortable seats, reflecting its appeal in Valli's eyes.
12. **Passengers on the bus:** Since it is a quiet time of day, there are only six or seven passengers, making Valli more noticeable.
13. **Why the conductor calls her 'madam':** He uses the term humorously because Valli behaves like a self-important adult and insists on being treated seriously.
14. **Why Valli does not get off in town:** She only wants to experience the bus ride and avoids getting down to prevent spending extra money or getting lost.
15. **Why she refuses the cold drink:** She lacks extra money and prefers not to accept anything for free, showing self-respect.
16. **The old woman's role:** The old woman irritates Valli with her questions and appearance, revealing Valli's childish impatience and slight sense of superiority.
17. **Turning point of the story:** The sight of the dead cow changes the cheerful tone of the journey into a serious emotional experience.

## Character Sketch

### Conductor

The conductor is depicted as a cheerful, friendly, and kind-hearted individual who brings humour and warmth to the narrative. Described as a “jolly sort, fond of joking,” his playful address of Valli as “madam” adds to the comic tone of the story. His teasing is gentle and affectionate rather than mocking. He assists Valli in boarding the bus, ensures she gets a comfortable seat, speaks kindly to her, and even offers her a drink at the town stop. He recognises her seriousness and independence and treats her with both amusement and respect. His presence contributes to making the journey safe and enjoyable for her, acting as a supportive adult figure without interfering in her experience.

### Valli's Mother

Valli's mother is portrayed as a typical village woman who appears briefly but holds significance in the background of the story. She is caring yet unaware of her daughter's inner thoughts and secret plans. Her habit of taking an afternoon nap enables Valli to carry out her journey unnoticed. Towards the end, her casual remark that people cannot fully understand everything in the world gains deeper meaning, even though she herself does not realise its relevance to Valli's experience. Through her character, the story highlights the gap between adult assumptions and a child's hidden understanding.

## Central Message

The story conveys that curiosity, determination, and independent thinking contribute to a child's growth, but it also emphasizes that life is not limited to joy and excitement. While Valli's journey begins as a dream fulfilled, it concludes with her first meaningful encounter with death. Thus, the narrative suggests that growing up involves moving from innocence to deeper awareness. It also highlights that children often perceive and understand more than adults assume.

## Narrator's Tone

The narrator's tone is gentle, sympathetic, humorous, and subtly reflective. Initially, it captures Valli's excitement and the light-hearted exchanges with the conductor. Later, it becomes serious and thoughtful with the introduction of the dead cow. This shift in tone mirrors Valli's emotional progression from joy to maturity.

## Word Meanings

Wistfully — with a sense of longing or quiet desire.

Kindle — to arouse or awaken feelings.

Slang expression — an informal phrase used in everyday language.

Discreet — careful and cautious in speech or action.

Slack time – a period of low activity.

Haughtily – in a proud or arrogant manner.

Mimicking – imitating someone's behaviour or speech.

Repulsive – causing strong dislike.

Thriftily – in a careful and economical way.

Resolutely stifled – suppressed firmly with determination.

Curtly – in a brief and rude manner.

Drivel – foolish or meaningless talk.

Ventured out – went out bravely or cautiously.

Hamlet – a small village.

Wayside – at the edge of a road.

Slowed to a crawl – moved very slowly.

Thoroughfare – a busy public road.

Merchandise – goods available for sale.

Spreadeagled – stretched out with limbs extended.

Haunted – remained in the mind continuously.

Pokes her nose – interferes unnecessarily.

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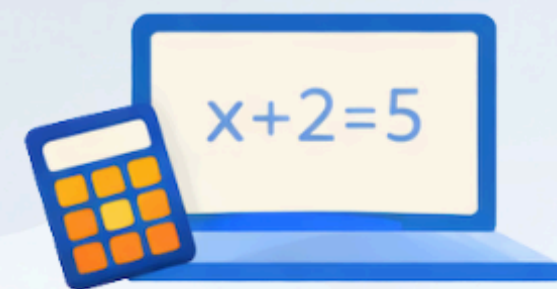
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